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ABSTRACT

This report describes a project which developed and implemented a process for the ongoing identification of national information needed for improving programs and services to infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities. The process involved creating a polling panel of stakeholder groups, creating a list of national program information needs for use in surveying the 17 members of the polling panel, and conducting a two-round Delphi process to rank the relative importance of the information needs. The results of the process indicated that the polling panel members perceived the following areas to be the most critical areas of information need: personnel development, the role of special education in reform, accountability for outcomes, and interagency collaboration. Results indicate a high degree of need for information that can guide state and local decisionmakers responsible for implementing policies and practices that will improve the results of education for children and youth with disabilities. Appendixes contain a list of polling panel members and copies of materials sent to polling panel members. (JDD)

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IDENTIFICATION OF NATIONAL INFORMATION NEEDED FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

JUNE 30, 1993

Prepared by:

Project FORUM at NASDSE as
Year 1 Deliverable #8
Under Contract Number HS92015001

Prepared for:

Office of Special Education Programs
U.S. Department of Education

National Association of State Directors of Special Education
1800 Diagonal Road, Suite 320
Alexandria, VA 22314

EC 302387

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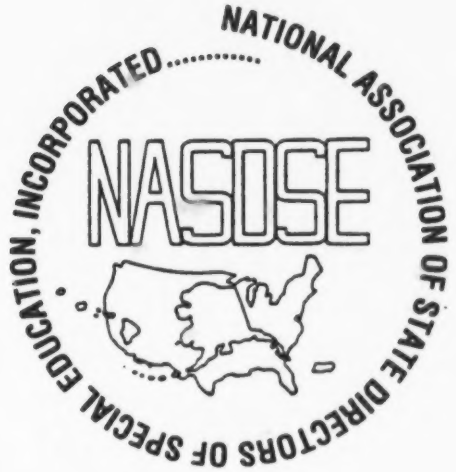
IDENTIFICATION OF NATIONAL INFORMATION NEEDED FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

JUNE 30, 1993



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Project FORUM at NASDSE would like to thank the members of the Polling Panel for giving their valuable time to assisting Project FORUM with the identification of national information needed for program improvement. We sincerely appreciate their efforts on our behalf.

Preparation of this report was funded by the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education under Contract No. HS92015001. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Department of Education of the Office of Special Education Programs.

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Executive Summary

The identification and tracking of relevant information is critical to decisionmaking and policy development in contemporary society. In recognition of this reality, Congress amended the IDEA to assure that information would be gathered and analyzed that was necessary for achieving program and system improvements at the State and local levels. The IDEA directs the Secretary of Education to develop and implement a process for the on-going identification of national information needed for improving programs and services to infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities. The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) under its Project FORUM Contract No. HS92015001 with the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has been assisting OSEP with this effort. This paper reports the results of the Project's initial efforts to identify program improvement information needs.

The process used to identify program improvement information needs was developed during December 1992 with extensive input from an expert consultant and a variety of stakeholders invested in the education of students with disabilities. The process involved three steps:

1) Creating a polling panel of stakeholder groups that included parents, advocates and professionals with a primary focus on more than one specific disability category, experts on the process of transition from school to adult life, local and State school board members, and groups representing constituencies with political and fiscal authority (e.g., the Council of Chief State School Officers). Individuals were identified who have regular and systematic contact with other parents and/or professionals who similarly serve the needs of children and youth with disabilities.

2) Creating a list of national program information needs for use in surveying Polling Panel members. Project FORUM staff developed an initial list that was based on information needs generated in February 1992, when Project FORUM convened a two-day Focus Group of experts to assist OSEP in identifying information needed for program improvement under Section 618 of the IDEA. These experts generated individual information needs statements and collapsed them into broad *categories* of information needs.

3) A two-round Delphi process was used to rank the relative importance of the broad categories of national program information needs. For the first round, all members of the Polling Panel were asked to react to the initial list of information needs. Edits and revisions to the list were encouraged. Polling panel members were asked to identify the *most important* information needs as well as indicate those that *were not* of interest to their constituencies. Project FORUM staff analyzed the Polling Panel's feedback, synthesized the stakeholder input, and refined the information needs statements. During round two, Polling Panel members were asked to re-rate the categories of information needed relative to the impact of the

information need on improving programs for students with disabilities and the importance of the information in leveraging program improvement in the not too distant future. The ratings from the first round of the Delphi process were also included so that Polling Panel members could re-evaluate their ratings based on those of other respondents.

The results of the process indicated that the Polling Panel members perceived *Personnel Development*, *The Role of Special Education in Reform*, *Accountability for Outcomes*, and *Interagency Collaboration* to be the most critical areas for national information needed for program improvement. Respondents commented that all of the information needs categories could be ranked as high priorities and that actual ratings reflected the relative position of the categories rather than an absolute standard. These are initial results of an ongoing process. Project FORUM at NASDSE will continue to build upon the State level needs identification efforts of other OSEP sponsored activities and projects (e.g., the Regional Resources Centers; the National Information Action Center at NASDSE); and obtain information about the needs of other stakeholder groups directly from national organizations that serve these constituencies.

The results of this initial effort at identifying information needed to improve the management, administration, delivery, and effectiveness of special education programs offer several suggestions for OSEP's consideration. One of these is investing in activities that will assist OSEP's network of knowledge producers to develop vehicles for collaborating with local administrators and teachers in order to produce information that is relevant to their current information needs. A second strategy is to facilitate the timely and meaningful exchange of information between OSEP's knowledge produces and the State and local administrators who are in a position to apply this knowledge to improving the education programs serving infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities.

IDENTIFICATION OF NATIONAL INFORMATION NEEDED FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

Background and Introduction

The critical importance of information in decisionmaking and policy development has long been recognized, and contemporary technology has made the identification, tracking, and analysis of information in a timely fashion a critical necessity for organizations in our society. It is impossible for individuals who are responsible for the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to access and read all of the ever-growing array of information that could be useful in helping them make decisions that would improve the system and yield better results for infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities. Recognizing the implications of this situation prompted Congress to amend Section 618(c)(3) of the IDEA to require the Department of Education to undertake activities to "identify implementation issues, desired improvements, and information needed by State and local agencies to achieve such improvements ..."

The statute directs the Secretary of Education to develop and implement "a process for the on-going identification of national program information needed for improving the management, administration, delivery, and effectiveness of programs and services under the Act." The process is to be conducted in cooperation with State Education Agencies (SEAs) to insure broad Statewide input. The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) under its Project FORUM Contract No. HS92015001 has been assisting the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) with this effort. This paper reports on the results of the Project's initial efforts to identify program improvement information needs.

The process used to identify program improvement information needs was designed during the Fall of 1992. Project FORUM convened a series of three stakeholder meetings to obtain input into the design of the information needs identification process. A briefing paper outlining the task as well as several considerations and options related to need identification was developed by an expert consultant and distributed to stakeholders before attending the informal half-day meetings. Telephone interviews were conducted with stakeholders who could not attend any of the meetings. A report on the results of this activity was submitted to (and subsequently approved by) OSEP at the end of December 1992.

As discussed in the December 1992 report, a *marketing model* was selected as the primary approach to information need identification and analysis. The consultant preparing the background paper as well as stakeholders who had attended planning meetings supported the use of this model -- particularly favoring the concept of stakeholders as "customers." The marketing model involves using the strategy of polling "real" stakeholders, not just "experts", to find out what they perceive to be their information needs. This approach was considered time and cost effective, if the stakeholders had an interest in the outcome of the process and the information being requested.

Method

The process of identifying and prioritizing information needed for program improvement was initiated in March 1993 with the creation of a polling panel. An initial list of information needs was generated and members of the Polling Panel participated in two rounds of a Delphi process to prioritize the identified needs.

Creation of a Polling Panel

The marketing model relies on using a group or groups of consumers as informants. For the purpose of identifying national information needed for improvement in the management, administration, delivery, and effectiveness of programs and services for infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities, Project FORUM established a polling panel to function in this role.

The process of creating a polling panel involved the identification of specific stakeholder groups and the selection of individuals who would represent the interests of these stakeholders. Stakeholder groups identified included parents, advocates and professionals with a primary focus on more than one specific disability category, experts on the process of transition from school to adult life, local and State school board members, and groups representing constituencies with political and fiscal authority (e.g., the Council of Chief State School Officers). With assistance of the leadership in many national stakeholder groups, individuals were identified who have regular and systematic contact with parents or professionals whose interest in the educational needs of children and youth with disabilities are similar. (A list of Polling Panel members is attached as Appendix A.)

The Polling Panel was used to react to and revise working lists of potential information needs for program improvement. Polling Panel members were also involved in verifying and prioritizing lists, and some members assisted in collapsing the lists of very specific needs into broader categories of information.

Creating an Initial List of National Program Information Needs

The *marketing model* requires consumers to react to a 'test product'. In the case of this task, the 'test product' was an initial list of national program information needs. There are an unlimited number of ways of generating such a list ranging from pure speculation to elaborate scientific surveying. Given resources available for this effort plus the relatively short time frame for obtaining the information, and in keeping with the advice of stakeholders, Project FORUM derived this initial list from existing information sources.

Project FORUM asked members of the Polling Panel to respond to a list that was based on information needs generated in February 1992, when Project FORUM convened

a two-day Focus Group of experts to assist OSEP in identifying information needed for program improvement under Section 618 of the IDEA. Focus Group participants individually generated lists of issues and identified information need statements related to them. Collectively, participants collapsed these individual need statements into broad *categories* of information needs that became incorporated into the first draft of OSEP's special studies agenda. The output from this meeting was used as the base for developing the 'test product' for the Polling Panel's reactions.

Other existing information reviewed to generate this initial list included information from Project FORUM's Issues Tracking Database, results of the annual survey of State Directors of Special Education that is conducted by the National Information Action Center at NASDSE, and material supplied by other national associations (e.g., NASBE, CCSSO) and national clearinghouses, (e.g., NICHCY, ERIC at CEC) that maintain databases about the inquiries they receive. The information gathered essentially reiterated the list of issues and topics that had been generated by the experts at the February 1992 Focus Group thus confirming the earlier work. The initial list of information needs given to the Polling Panel were stated in broad categories and included a description of the kinds of improvements the information was needed to achieve.

Initial List of Information Needs

- ***Program Management and Regulatory Flexibility***. Currently, many stakeholders express interest in information about how regulations may "enable" rather than "impede" the development of creative educational approaches that will facilitate successful outcomes and still preserve due process rights for students with disabilities.

- ***Accountability for Outcomes***. Accountability for the implementation of the IDEA has, arguably, been limited to monitoring procedural compliance and Federal data reporting. Many stakeholders have expressed a need for information focusing on defining and assessing learning outcomes for students with disabilities.

- ***Community Supported Schools***. Given the changing demographic conditions of American society, and the concomitant diversity of students' needs, stakeholders have expressed the need for information on how the school can become a focal point for the delivery of comprehensive services from other community based agencies to students and their families.

- ***Personnel Development***. For real and substantial change in our educational system to take place, training and ongoing retraining of teachers is clearly essential. Stakeholders have expressed the need for information regarding how to reconfigure the relationships and responsibilities of staff and redesign programs that train both

special and regular education personnel to work collaboratively in school environments.

- *Interagency Collaboration.* Stakeholders report that fragmentation in the delivery of services from multiple agencies continues to be problematic. Stakeholders further report the need for information about a consistent system of service delivery based on well managed tracking systems that support wrap-around and follow-along service models that will reduce gaps in services and lessen burdens on families.

- *Technological Capacity.* According to stakeholders, the accelerating evolution of technology poses unique challenges for school systems. Changes in technology will impact on the information needed for program improvement and on the development and analysis of policy affecting all aspects of instruction, administration, and evaluation.

- *Alternative Assessments for Eligibility.* Considerable controversy currently exists over the process of determining eligibility for special education. Information is needed about how to best conduct assessments that are reliable, valid, cost effective, and useful for eligibility determination as well as IEP development, program design, and outcome evaluation.

- *Over-representation of Minorities in Special Education.* Information is needed about determining participation of minority students in special education. Stakeholders are interested in knowing why minority students are disproportionately represented in special education as well what kinds of actions are effective in changing these patterns.

- *Children on the "Boundary".* It is currently recognized that many at-risk children are "falling through the cracks" between regular and special education. Sometimes these children are considered socially maladjusted or ADD; sometimes these children may be eligible under Section 504 but not under the IDEA. Stakeholders need information to develop policy that fairly addresses these students' needs.

- *The Role of Special Education in General Education Reform.* The systemic reform of U.S. public schools remains a high priority on the Federal agenda for education and in many States. To what degree should students with disabilities be included in school and Statewide testing programs? To what extent should the abilities of students with disabilities be considered in the development of educational standards? What implications does site-based management have for special educators? Information is needed relative to these questions and how general education reform efforts are related to the development of unified or inclusive approaches to the education of students with disabilities.

- *Auxiliary Personnel.* There are predicted shortages in related services personnel such as occupational and physical therapists, and school psychologists. In addition, it is predicted that paraprofessionals will have an increasingly important role in service delivery. Issues in this category include personnel demand and supply, the effective use of personnel, the training of professional and paraprofessional personnel, and cost-efficient ways of providing related services.

Delphi Process

A two-round Delphi process was used to rank the relative importance of the broad categories of national program information needed. For the first round, all members of the Polling Panel were asked to react to the initial list of information needs. (See Appendix B for materials sent to Polling Panel members for the first round.) Polling Panel members were instructed to add items that represented their constituency's critical information needs. Edits and revisions to the list were encouraged. Polling Panel members were asked to identify the *most important* information needs as well as indicate those that *were* not of interest to their constituencies. Project FORUM staff analyzed the Polling Panel's feedback, synthesized the stakeholder input, and refined the information needs statements.

During round two Polling Panel members were asked to re-rate the categories of information needed relative to the impact of the information need on improving programs for students with disabilities and the importance of the information in leveraging program improvement in the not too distant future. The ratings from the first round of the Delphi process were also included so that Polling Panel members could re-evaluate their ratings based on those of other respondents. (See Appendix C for materials sent in the second round.) For the second round, panel members were offered the option of providing their feedback to a Project FORUM staff member by phone rather than having to complete the response form and mail it back.

Results

As outlined in the methods section of this report, the Delphi process consisted of two rounds. In the first round 17 out of 31 members of the Polling Panel (55 percent) responded to the survey. This return rate, while it was disappointing to Project FORUM staff, is not inconsistent with the return rate for many other surveys in which there is no follow-up letter or phone call[1]. The return rate does, however, indicate that caution should be exercised in generalizing from the results. Follow-up phone calls were initiated for the second round of the process in order to improve the return rate.

[1] See Borg and Gall (1983), Educational Research: An Introduction, pp. 429-434, for a discussion of expected return rates and the effects of follow-up strategies.

A summary of their responses for round one is shown in Table 1. Respondents tended to give all categories a high priority rating. The categories of *Accountability for Outcomes*, *Personnel Development*, and *Role of Special Education in Reform* \received the most *high priority* ratings (15 or 88 percent of the 17 respondents). The category of *Over-representation of Minority Students in Special Education* received the least *high priority* ratings (7 or 41 percent).

Although the survey was structured to elicit definite responses as to whether a category was a *high* or *low* priority, the categories of *Community Supported Schools*, *Alternative Assessments for Eligibility*, and *Auxiliary Personnel* each received one *medium* priority rating.

The category of *Technological Capacity* received the most *low priority* ratings (7 or 41 percent). The category of *Over-representation of Minority Students in Special Education* received the most *not needed* (3 or 18 percent). No other information needs category received more than one rating of *not needed*.

Respondents did not rate some categories. However, no category had missing data from more than two respondents. In all, there were 14 missing responses.

Comments from the Polling Panel members tended to underscore the intensity with which particular ratings were assigned (e.g., "Yes, this category is a real need in my area."). Some respondents suggested that it was difficult <u>not</u> to rate all categories as a *high priority*. Difficulty in rating the information needs categories was attributed to their being very broad and over arching. Several respondents suggested adding a category regarding general and special education finance and funding and reimbursement issues. (Advice that was followed in the second round of the Delphi process.) One commenter felt that the language of the survey was quite abstruse and that the categories encompassed many information needs, thus making it difficult to give one, overall rating to a category. This commenter stated that the survey needed to be redesigned and that the best approach was to "start over."

The return rated increased in the second round with 20 out of 31 Polling Panel members (65%) responding. For round two of the Delphi process, members of the Polling Panel were sent a new survey that included the new category of finance along with respondents' ratings from round one of the process. Members of the Polling Panel were asked to reconsider their ratings based on the ratings of other respondents, and to edit, revise, and provide additional comments. Polling Panel members were contacted by telephone so that they could provide their ratings and comments verbally if they so desired.

The results from round two of the process are shown in Table 2. They are consistent with those of round one. Respondents rated most categories as *high priority*. The categories of *Accountability for Outcomes*, *Personnel Development*, and *Role of Special Education in*

Table 1
Responses for Round One
n=17

Categories	High priority	Low priority	Not needed	No rating
Accountability for Outcomes	15 (88%)	1 (6%)	0	1 (6%)
Personnel Development	15 (88%)	1 (6%)	0	1 (6%)
Role of Special Education in Reform	15 (88%)	0	1 (6%)	1 (6%)
Auxiliary Personnel[1]	13 (76%)	3 (18%)	0	0
Interagency Collaboration	13 (76%)	3 (18%)	0	1 (6%)
Alternative Assessments[1]	11 (65%)	4 (23%)	0	1 (6%)
Program Management	11 (65%)	4 (23%)	1 (6%)	1 (6%)
Children on the "Boundary"	10 (60%)	4 (24%)	1 (6%)	2 (12%)
Community Supported Schools[1]	10 (58%)	3 (18%)	1 (6%)	2 (12%)
Technological Capacity	8 (47%)	7 (41%)	0	2 (12%)
Over-representation of Minorities	7 (41%)	5 (30%)	3 (18%)	2 (12%)

[1] One respondent rated this category as a "medium priority."

Reform again received the most *high priority* ratings. (In fact, *Personnel Development*, and *Role of Special Education in Reform* received only *high priority* ratings.) As in the first round, *Technological Capacity* and *Over-representation of Minorities* received the most *low priority* ratings. The new category of *Finance/Funding Formulas* received 12 (60 percent) *high priority* ratings. However, it also received three (15 percent) *no ratings*, and comments indicated that this item would have been more highly rated if the category had not included the term "reform" reading simply "general and special education finance."

Table 2
Responses for Round Two
n=20

Categories	High priority	Low priority	Not needed	No rating
Personnel Development	20 (100%)	0	0	0
Role of Special Education in Reform	20 (100%)	0	0	0
Accountability for Outcomes	19 (95%)	1 (5%)	0	0
Interagency Collaboration	17 (83%)	3 (15%)	0	0
Auxiliary Personnel	13 (65%)	6 (30%)	0	1 (6%)
Program Management	13 (65%)	6 (30%)	1 (5%)	0
Alternative Assessments[1]	12 (56%)	5 (25%)	0	2 (10%)
Finance/Funding Formulas[1]	12 (60%)	4 (20%)	0	3 (15%)
Children on the "Boundary"	11 (55%)	8 (40%)	0	1 (5%)
Community Supported Schools[1,2,3]	11 (55%)	5 (25%)	0	0
Over-representation of Minorities[2]	8 (40%)	8 (40%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)
Technological Capacity[1]	6 (30%)	12 (60%)	1 (5%)	0

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

[1] Received "medium priority" rating(s)
[2] One respondent rated this as "other"
[3] One respondent rated this as "high in cities, low in suburbs"

Prioritized List

A prioritized list of the information needs categories resulting from this process is presented below. Information needs with identical ratings by the Polling Panel are listed alphabetically.

- Personnel Development. (100 percent)
- The Role of Special Education in General Education Reform. (100 percent)
- Accountability for Outcomes. (95 percent)
- Interagency Collaboration. (85 percent)
- Auxiliary Personnel. (65 percent)

- Program Management and Regulatory Flexibility. (65 percent)
- Alternative Assessments for Eligibility. (60 percent)
- General and Special Education Finance Reform. (60 percent)
- Children on the "Boundary". (55 percent)
- Community Supported Schools. (55 percent)
- Over-representation of Minorities in Special Education. (40 percent)
- Technological Capacity. (30 percent)

Conclusions

The purpose of this activity was to utilize a stakeholder panel to identify and prioritize information needed to improve the management, administration, delivery and effectiveness of special education programs and present the results to OSEP for use in its program planning. Several considerations for OSEP did emerge and these are discussed below. However, the limitations of the method used to obtain the prioritized list of information needs should be noted and generalizations and decisions based on it should be made cautiously.

Lessons Learned

While the Polling Panel approach chosen by Project FORUM was a realistic one given the limited resources available for the task, the individuals participating did not represent a random sample of national stakeholders. Nevertheless, the range panel member responses regarding the relative importance of even such broad categories of information need as described in our survey probably does represent the diversity of conditions and circumstances experienced by stakeholders located at different points in the system.

Because some respondents commented that "they would rank them all high," actual ratings very likely reflects the relative position of the categories rather than an absolute standard. The results of this process, therefore, should not be used to eliminate any category from further consideration as a potential area of information need.

In addition, the process did not necessarily reflect the *intensity* of respondents' ratings. Future surveys should employ a Likert scale ranking to allow for finer distinctions among opinions of information needs.

The results of the process of initial implementation of the plan are probably best viewed as tentative and as part of an evolving process to more systematically and accurately determine the major categories of national information needed for program improvement.

Project FORUM and NASDSE are committed to providing OSEP with the best possible information and therefore intend to apply the "lessons learned" from this activity

to future efforts. Among these are: continuing to build upon the State-level needs identification efforts of other OSEP sponsored activities and projects (e.g., the Regional Resources Centers; the National Information Action Center at NASDSE); obtaining information about the needs of other stakeholder groups directly from national organizations that serve these constituencies; reviewing the role of the Polling Panel particularly with regard to evaluating the initial list of information needs; and refining the survey process and instrument used to establish the relative priority of information needs.

Recommendations

The results of the process did, however, yield some indication of the particular management, administration, and service delivery strategies needing improvement. Areas that respondents clearly identified as priorities were *Accountability for Outcomes*, *Personnel Development*, and *Role of Special Education in Reform*. The high priority given to these clusters appears to represent high degree of need for information that can guide State and local decisionmakers responsible for implementing policies and practices that will improve the **results** of education for children and youth with disabilities. OSEP has a number of investments in projects that are generating information that can address these needs. Among these are the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO), the Center for Policy Studies at the University of Maryland, and the Center for Special Education Finance (CSEF). The National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) being conducted for OSEP by SRI, International has provided a wealth of information about the post school outcomes of students with disabilities and identified a number of variables that can influence the direction of these outcomes. However, the integration of information available from these and other OSEP research and information projects by State and local special education decisionmakers has not been fully realized.

The results of this initial effort at identifying information needed to improve the management, administration, delivery, and effectiveness of special education programs offer several suggestions for OSEP's consideration. One of these is investing in activities that will assist OSEP's network of knowledge producers to develop vehicles for collaborating with local administrators and teachers in order to produce information that is relevant to their current information needs. A second strategy is to facilitate the timely and meaningful exchange of information between OSEP's knowledge produces and the State and local administrators who are in a position to apply this knowledge to improving the education programs serving infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities.

APPENDIX A - List of Polling Panel Members

NAME	AFFILIATION
Alan Abeson	The ARC
Amie Amiot	American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
Fred Balcom	Idaho State Department of Education
Amy Batiste	Clearinghouse on Professions in Special Education
Frank Betts	Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Lynne Cook	Clearinghouse on Professions in Special Education
Smokey Davis	Associate Director, NASDSE
Harold Dent	Hampton University
Grace Zamora Duran	Council for Exceptional Children
Sue Gamm	Chicago Public Schools
Rhona Hartman	HEATH Resource Center
Barbara Huff	Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
Judy Katz-Leavy	Child and Family Support Branch CASSP, NIMH
Ed Keller	National Association of Elementary School Principals
Chris Koyanagi	National Mental Health Association
Justine Maloney	Learning Disabilities Association
Paul Marchand	The ARC
Gary Marx	American Association of School Administrators
Jonathan McIntire	Rutland (VT) SW Supervisory Union

Celane McWhorter	The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps
Ruth Mondschein	LaRaza
Joan Nelson	NIAC at NASDSE
Suzanne Ripley	National Information Center for Children & Youth with Handicaps
Virginia Roach	National Association of State Boards of Education
Jeff Schneider	National Education Association
Damaris Sifuentes	Puerto Rico Department of Education
Julian Taplin	Division of Child Mental Health Services (DE)
Jo Thomason	Council of Administrators of Special Education
Frederick Weintraub	The Council for Exceptional Children
Judith Weitz	Center for the Study of Social Policy
Martha Ziegler	Federation for Children with Special Needs

APPENDIX B - Materials sent to Polling Panel for First Round of the Delphi Process

National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Inc
King Street Station I, 1800 Diagonal Road, Suite 320, Alexandria, VA 22314
Tel: 703/519-3800 • Fax: 703/519-3808 • TDD: 703/519-7008 • SpecialNet: NASDSE

April 16, 1993

1~
2~

Dear 3~:

Thank you for agreeing to being on Project FORUM's polling panel and participating in our efforts to determine the information needed to improve the management, administration, delivery and effectiveness of special education programs for infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities. As you know from conversations with Ed McCaul, this is the first phase of a multi-year activity. Input from the full spectrum of stakeholders in the special education community is very important to the success of this endeavor.

Enclosed you will find a brief background paper explaining the task and providing a framework for the task you have agreed to perform. The list of categories of information needs is also enclosed. After examining this material, please evaluate the information needs categories relative to the following:

- Indicate which of these needs are a high priority, a low priority or do not reflect the information needs of your constituents.
- Revise or edit information needs to clarify or more accurately state the questions or issue.
- Add other information needs that are important to your constituents or colleagues.

Please make any additional comments you think would improve this process. After Project FORUM staff have analyzed the responses from the polling panel, we will be mailing the revised list to you for additional verification and prioritization of the categories.

Once again, we thank you for participating in this effort. If you have any questions, please call me or Ed McCaul at 703-519-3800.

Sincerely,

Trina W. Osher, Director
Project FORUM

cc: Smokey Davis, Associate Director

A PLAN FOR THE IDENTIFICATION OF NATIONAL INFORMATION NEEDED FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

Prepared by Project FORUM at NASDSE
Under U.S. ED Contract No. HS92015001

Background and Introduction

The importance of information in decision making and policy development has long been recognized, and contemporary technology has made the identification, tracking, and analysis of information in a timely fashion a critical necessity for organizations in our society. It is impossible for individuals who are responsible for the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to access and read the ever-growing array of information that could be useful in making decisions that would improve the system and yield better results for infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities. Recognizing the implications of this situation prompted Congress to amend Section 618(c)(3) of the IDEA to assure that information would be gathered and analyzed that was "necessary for achieving program and system improvements at the State and local levels".

The statute directs the Secretary of Education to develop and implement "a process for the on-going identification of national program information needed for improving the management, administration, delivery and effectiveness of programs and services under the Act." The process is to be conducted in cooperation with State Education Agencies (SEAs) to insure broad statewide input. The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) under its Project FORUM Contract No. HS92015001 with the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has the task of assisting OSEP with this effort. This paper presents an overview of Project FORUM's plan to establish and implement the on-going process called for in the Act.

During December 1992, Project FORUM convened a series of three stakeholder meetings to obtain input into the design of the information needs identification process. Participants were given a briefing paper outlining the task before attending the informal half-day meetings. Telephone interviews were conducted with stakeholders who could not attend any of the meetings. In all, 19 stakeholders were contacted, 13 attended the stakeholder meetings, and 3 were interviewed by telephone.

The Plan

After preliminary work with a consultant with expertise in the area of needs analysis, Project FORUM staff chose to utilize a *marketing model* for information need identification and analysis. Stakeholders who had attended planning meetings reviewed the plan and supported the use of this model. They particularly favored the concept of stakeholders as "customers." The marketing model involves polling "real" stakeholders, not just "experts", to find out what they

perceive to be their information needs. This approach is time and cost effective if the stakeholders have an interest in the outcome of the process and the information being requested. The first step in this process involves the establishment of a "polling panel" of interested and committed stakeholders.

Creation of a polling panel. The marketing model relies on using a group or groups of consumers as informants. For the purpose of identifying national information needed for improving the management, administration, delivery, and effectiveness of programs and services for infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities, Project FORUM is establishing a polling panel to function in this role. We propose to use the polling panel in several ways. The full panel will be asked to react to and revise working lists of potential information needs for program improvement. Polling panel members will also be involved in verifying and prioritizing the lists as well as collapsing the lists into broader categories of information. Finally, we expect to involve polling panel members in reassessing the process for identifying national program information needs on an annual basis.

Creating an initial list of national program information needs. The *marketing model* requires that consumers react to a 'test product'. In this task, the 'test product' is an initial list of national program information needs. There are an unlimited number of ways of generating such a list ranging from pure speculation to elaborate scientific surveying. Given the relatively urgent need OSEP has for the information and in keeping with the advice of stakeholders, Project FORUM has derived this list from existing information sources.

For the first year, Project FORUM is asking members of the polling panel to respond to a list that includes information needs generated in January of 1992. At that time, Project FORUM convened a two-day Focus Group of experts to assist OSEP in identifying information needed for program improvement under Section 618 of the IDEA. Other sources used to generate the list for Year I include information from Project FORUM's Issues Tracking Database, results of the annual survey of State Directors of Special Education (conducted by the National Information Action Center at NASDSE), and similar material supplied by other national associations such as NASBE and CCSSO. Also, national clearinghouses, such as NICHCY and ERIC at CEC, maintain databases about the inquiries they receive and are sharing some of this information with Project FORUM fro consideration as possible topics to include on this list of national information needs. A copy of the list of information needs is attached at the end of this paper.

Project FORUM is asking all members of the polling panel to react to the list of information needs. Polling panel members should add items they believe represent their constituency's critical information needs. Edits and revisions to the list are encouraged. Polling panel members are also asked to identify the most important information needs and indicate those that are not of interest to their peers.

Project FORUM staff will analyze the polling panel's feedback and reorganize the list of identified needs by placing similar and related items into broad categories and synthesizing the stakeholder input for each category into a single but comprehensive information need statement. Project FORUM staff may use a conference call strategy to involve several members of the polling panel to clarify issues raised and to discuss options for organizing the list concisely.

Prioritizing the categories of identified needs. After reorganizing the list, Project FORUM staff will employ a Delphi process to rank the relative importance of the broad categories of national program information needed. At this stage, polling panel members will be asked to rank, on a scale of *1* (low) to *5* (high), the categories of information needed relative to both the **impact** of the information need on improving programs for students with disabilities, and the **likelihood** of obtaining sufficient information to leverage program improvement in the not too distant future.

Results. Using feedback from the Delphi process, information needs will be ranked according to stakeholder ratings, and the results provided to OSEP for use in its program planning. Project FORUM will also make the results available to all the stakeholder groups participating in the process and other interested parties. Project FORUM will use the results of this process by organizing a wide variety of information for potential use in achieving program improvements.

Time Line - Year 1

April	Initial list of information needs sent to polling panel
May	Feedback analyzed and synthesized into categories - possible conference calls with panel members for clarification and further validation
June	Delphi process for prioritization conducted
July	Delphi results analyzed and final list prepared
August	Report to OSEP on results of process
September	Final list published

Throughout the process, polling panel members will be asked for feedback regarding both the results and the process utilized for this first year. The active involvement of polling panel members is necessary to the success of the overall effort to identify and track the information needed for program improvement.

A PLAN FOR THE IDENTIFICATION OF NATIONAL INFORMATION NEEDED FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT
Project FORUM - Year I
U.S. ED Contract No. HS92015001
April 16, 1993

Categories of National Program Information Needs

- ***Program Management and Regulatory Flexibility.*** Currently, many stakeholders express interest in information about how regulations may "enable" rather than "impede" the development of creative educational approaches that will facilitate successful outcomes and still preserve due process rights for students with disabilities.

High Priority _____ Low Priority _____ Not Needed _____

Comments, edits, and suggestions: _____

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- ***Accountability for Outcomes.*** Accountability for the implementation of the IDEA has, arguably, been limited to monitoring procedural compliance and Federal data reporting. Many stakeholders have expressed a need for information focusing on defining and assessing learning outcomes for students with diabilities.

High Priority _____ Low Priority _____ Not Needed _____

Comments, edits, and suggestions: _____

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- ***Community Supported Schools.*** Given the changing demographic conditions of American society, and the concomitant diversity of students' needs, stakeholders have expressed the need for information on how the school can become a focal point for the delivery of comprehensive services from other community based agencies to students and their families.

High Priority _____ Low Priority _____ Not Needed _____

Comments, edits, and suggestions: _____

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- ***Personnel Development.*** For real and substantial change in our educational system to take place, training and ongoing retraining of teachers is clearly essential. Stakeholders have expressed the need for information regarding how to reconfigure the relationships and responsibilities of staff and redesign programs that train both special and regular education personnel to work collaboratively in school environments.

High Priority _____ Low Priority _____ Not Needed _____

Comments, edits, and suggestions: _____

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- ***Interagency Collaboration.*** Stakeholders report that fragmentation in the delivery of services from multiple agencies continues to be problematic. Stakeholders further report the need for information about a consistent system of service delivery based on well managed tracking systems that support wrap-around and follow-along service models that will reduce gaps in services and lessen burdens on families.

High Priority _____ Low Priority _____ Not Needed _____

Comments, edits, and suggestions: _____

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- ***Technological Capacity.*** According to stakeholders, the accelerating evolution of technology poses unique challenges for school systems. Changes in technology will impact on the information needed for program improvement and on the development and analysis of policy affecting all aspects of instruction, administration, and evaluation.

High Priority _____ Low Priority _____ Not Needed _____

Comments, edits, and suggestions: _____

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- ***Alternative assessments for eligibility.*** Considerable controversy currently exists over the process of determining eligibility for special education. Information is needed about how to best conduct assessments that are reliable, valid, cost effective, and useful for eligibility determination as well as IEP development, program design, and outcome evaluation.

High Priority _____ Low Priority _____ Not Needed _____

Comments, edits, and suggestions: _____

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- ***Over representation of minorities in special education.*** Information is needed about determining participation of minority students in special education. Stakeholders are interested in knowing why minority students are disproportionately represented in special education as well what kinds of actions are effective in changing these patterns..

High Priority _____ Low Priority _____ Not Needed _____

Comments, edits, and suggestions: _____

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- ***Children on the "boundary".*** It is currently recognized that many at-risk children are "falling through the cracks" between regular and special education. Sometimes these children are considered socially maladjusted or ADD; sometimes these children may be eligible under Section 504 but not under the IDEA. Stakeholders need information to develop policy that fairly addresses these students' needs.

High Priority _____ Low Priority _____ Not Needed _____

Comments, edits, and suggestions: _____

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- ***The role of special education in general education reform.*** The systemic reform of U.S. public schools remains a high priority on the Federal agenda for education and in many States. To what degree should students with disabilities be included in school and Statewide testing programs? To what extent should the abilities of students with disabilities be considered in the development of educational standards? What implications does site-based management have for special educators? Information is needed relative to these questions and how general education reform efforts are related to the development of unified or inclusive approaches to the education of students with disabilities.

High Priority _____ Low Priority _____ Not Needed _____

Comments, edits, and suggestions: _____

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- ***Auxiliary personnel.*** There are predicted shortages in related services personnel such as occupational and physical therapists, and school psychologists. In addition, it is predicted that paraprofessionals will have an increasingly important role in service delivery. Issues in this category include personnel demand and supply, the effective use of personnel, the training of professional and paraprofessional personnel, and cost-efficient ways of providing related services.

High Priority _____ Low Priority _____ Not Needed _____

Comments, edits, and suggestions: _____

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ADDITIONAL CATEGORIES/COMMENTS: Attach additional sheets if necessary.

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THANKS FOR YOUR HELP

Please use the enclosed envelope to return your feedback to:

Edward McCaul
Project FORUM at NASDSE
1800 Diagonal Road, Suite 320
Alexandria, VA 22314

APPENDIX C - Materials sent to Polling Panel for Second Round of the Delphi Process

National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Inc.
King Street Station I, 1800 Diagonal Road, Suite 320, Alexandria, VA 22314
Tel: 703/519-3800 FAX: 703/519-3808 TDD: 703/519-7008 SpecialNet: NASDSE

June 16, 1993

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Dear 3~:

Thank you for your response to our survey on the information needed to improve the management, administration, delivery and effectiveness of special education programs for infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities. As you know from conversations with Ed McCaul, this is the first phase of a multi-year activity. Input from the full spectrum of stakeholders in the special education community is very important to the success of this endeavor.

Enclosed is a revised list of information needs based on the responses to our first mailing. For those of you that responded to our first mailing, this provides you with the opportunity to revise and prioritize your ratings based on the ratings of other respondents. For those of you who did not respond, this provides you with the opportunity to rate the categories and give us feedback on the information needs of your constituents. The document shows the percentage of respondents rating each category as high priority, low priority, or not needed, and provides space for your new rating, comments, edits, and suggestions.

Please consider how to re-evaluate the information needs categories relative to the following:

- Indicate which of these needs are a high priority, a low priority or do not reflect the information needs of your constituents.
- Revise or edit information needs to clarify or more accurately state the questions or issue.
- Add other information needs that are important to your constituents or colleagues.

In order to expedite this second round of the process, Ed McCaul will be contacting you by phone shortly after June 17th. He will be prepared to take your new ratings verbally and transcribe your comments. If you prefer to make your own written response, please write directly on the enclosed document and return it to Ed McCaul, Project FORUM at NASDSE, 1800 Diagonal Road, Suite 320, Alexandria, VA 22314 as soon as possible and no later than June 22nd.

After Project FORUM staff have analyzed the second round of responses, we will be sending you a summary of the results. We thank you for participating in this effort. If you have any questions, please call me or Ed McCaul at 703-519-3800.

Sincerely,

Trina W. Osher, Director
Project FORUM

cc: Dr. Martha J. Fields, Executive Director

A PLAN FOR THE IDENTIFICATION OF
NATIONAL INFORMATION NEEDED FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT
Project FORUM - Year I
U.S. ED Contract No. HS92015001
June 11, 1993

Categories of National Program Information Needs

- ***Program Management and Regulatory Flexibility.*** Currently, many stakeholders express interest in information about how regulations may "enable" rather than "impede" the development of creative educational approaches that will facilitate successful outcomes and still preserve due process rights for students with disabilities.

Ratings of other respondents:

High Priority -**63%** Low Priority -**25%** Not Needed -**6%**

Note: Some respondents did not rate this category.

Your new rating:

High Priority _____ Low Priority _____ Not Needed _____

Comments, edits, and suggestions: _____

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- ***Accountability for Outcomes.*** Accountability for the implementation of the IDEA has, arguably, been limited to monitoring procedural compliance and Federal data reporting. Many stakeholders have expressed a need for information focusing on defining and assessing learning outcomes for students with disabilities.

Ratings of other respondents:

High Priority -**88%** Low Priority -**6%** Not Needed -**0%**

Note: Some respondents did not rate this category.

Your new rating:

High Priority _____ Low Priority _____ Not Needed _____

Comments, edits, and suggestions: _____

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- ***Community Supported Schools.*** Given the changing demographic conditions of American society, and the concomitant diversity of students' needs, stakeholders have expressed the need for information on how the school can become a focal point for the delivery of comprehensive services from other community based agencies to students and their families.

Ratings of other respondents:

High Priority -**56%** Low Priority -**19%** Not Needed-**6%**

Note: Some respondents did not rate this category; one respondent rated it as a "medium priority."

Your new rating:

High Priority _____ Low Priority _____ Not Needed _____

Comments, edits, and suggestions: _____

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- ***Personnel Development.*** For real and substantial change in our educational system to take place, training and ongoing retraining of teachers is clearly essential. Stakeholders have expressed the need for information regarding how to reconfigure the relationships and responsibilities of staff and redesign programs that train both special and regular education personnel to work collaboratively in school environments.

Ratings of other respondents:

High Priority -**88%** Low Priority -**6%** Not Needed-**0%**

Note: Some respondents did not rate this category.

Your new rating:

High Priority _____ Low Priority _____ Not Needed _____

Comments, edits, and suggestions: _____

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- ***Interagency Collaboration.*** Stakeholders report that fragmentation in the delivery of services from multiple agencies continues to be problematic. Stakeholders further report the need for information about a consistent system of service delivery based on well managed tracking systems that support wrap-around and follow-along service models that will reduce gaps in services and lessen burdens on families.

Ratings of other respondents:

High Priority **-75%** Low Priority **-19%** Not Needed **-0%**

Note: Some respondents did not rate this category.

Your new rating:

High Priority _____ Low Priority _____ Not Needed _____

Comments, edits, and suggestions: _____

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- ***Technological Capacity.*** According to stakeholders, the accelerating evolution of technology poses unique challenges for school systems. Changes in technology will impact on the information needed for program improvement and on the development and analysis of policy affecting all aspects of instruction, administration, and evaluation.

Ratings of other respondents:

High Priority **-44%** Low Priority **-44%** Not Needed-**0%**

Note: Some respondents did not rate this category.

Your new rating:

High Priority _____ Low Priority _____ Not Needed _____

Comments, edits, and suggestions: _____

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- ***Alternative assessments for eligibility.*** Considerable controversy currently exists over the process of determining eligibility for special education. Information is needed about how to best conduct assessments that are reliable, valid, cost effective, and useful for eligibility determination as well as IEP development, program design, and outcome evaluation.

Ratings of other respondents:

High Priority -**63%** Low Priority -**25%** Not Needed -**0%**

Note: One respondent rated this category as a "medium priority."

Your new rating:

High Priority _____ Low Priority _____ Not Needed _____

Comments, edits, and suggestions: _____

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- ***Over representation of minorities in special education.*** Information is needed about determining participation of minority students in special education. Stakeholders are interested in knowing why minority students are disproportionately represented in special education as well what kinds of actions are effective in changing these patterns.

Ratings of other respondents:

High Priority -**38%** Low Priority -**31%** Not Needed -**19%**

Note: Some respondents did not rate this category.

Your new rating:

High Priority _____ Low Priority _____ Not Needed _____

Comments, edits, and suggestions: _____

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- ***Children on the "boundary".*** It is currently recognized that many at-risk children are "falling through the cracks" between regular and special education. Sometimes these children are considered socially maladjusted or ADD; sometimes these children may be eligible under Section 504 but not under the IDEA. Stakeholders need information to develop policy that fairly addresses these students' needs.

Ratings of other respondents:

High Priority -**56%** Low Priority -**25%** Not Needed -**6%**

Note: Some respondents did not rate this category.

Your new rating:

High Priority _____ Low Priority _____ Not Needed _____

Comments, edits, and suggestions: _____

_____

- ***The role of special education in general education reform.*** The systemic reform of U.S. public schools remains a high priority on the Federal agenda for education and in many States. To what degree should students with disabilities be included in school and Statewide testing programs? To what extent should the abilities of students with disabilities be considered in the development of educational standards? What implications does site-based management have for special educators? Information is needed relative to these questions and how general education reform efforts are related to the development of unified or inclusive approaches to the education of students with disabilities.

Ratings of other respondents:

High Priority -**88%** Low Priority -**0%** Not Needed -**6%**

Note: Some respondents did not rate this category.

Your new rating:

High Priority _____ Low Priority _____ Not Needed _____

Comments, edits, and suggestions: _____

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- ***Auxiliary personnel.*** There are predicted shortages in related services personnel such as occupational and physical therapists, and school psychologists. In addition, it is predicted that paraprofessionals will have an increasingly important role in service delivery. Issues in this category include personnel demand and supply, the effective use of personnel, the training of professional and paraprofessional personnel, and cost-efficient ways of providing related services.

Ratings of other respondents:

High Priority -**75%** Low Priority -**19%** Not Needed-**0%**

Note: One respondent rated this category as a "medium priority."

Your new rating:

High Priority _____ Low Priority _____ Not Needed _____

Comments, edits, and suggestions: _____

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- Several respondents suggested a category on *general and special education finance reform.* I would rate this category as:

High Priority _____ Low Priority _____ Not Needed _____

Comments, edits, and suggestions: _____

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ADDITIONAL CATEGORIES/COMMENTS: Attach additional sheets if necessary.

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THANKS FOR YOUR HELP

Please use the enclosed envelope to return your feedback by June 14 to:

Edward McCaul
Project FORUM at NASDSE
1800 Diagonal Road, Suite 320
Alexandria, VA 22314